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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a series of interactive activities designed to help educators make diversity awareness part of their teaching. The activities are: "Best Friends," which helps people recognize the role race plays in their perceptions of people and in their values; "Conclusion Jumping," which helps people identify common stereotypes and raise awareness of common attitudes and feelings toward other individuals' sexual orientation and gender (pointing out that most people have commonly held stereotypes that are triggered by certain words); "Banana Exercise," which introduces the concept of stereotypes and illustrates how generalizations influence people's thinking; and "Cultural Differences in Communication," which points out the impact culture has on communication style and comfort level. (SM)

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Making Diversity Awareness Part of Your Teaching

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Making Diversity Awareness Part of Your Teaching

Presented at the 43rd Biennial Convocation of Kappa Delta Pi. Orlando, FL. November 2001.

By Rea Kirk, John Nkemnji (professors) and Katherine Gudgeon, Sarah Hardy, Gina Hooker, Mark Lowry, and Brionne Roberts (students).

Multicultural education and diversity awareness is a reform movement to promote equity. It is based on eradicating sources of race, gender, ethnic, class, disability, and sexual orientation bias. Carefully created human relations activities and debriefings connected to authentic experiences can be powerful in illuminating the nature of bias and providing tools for creating an anti-bias curriculum.

At the 43rd Biennial Convocation of Kappa Delta Pi (an international education honorary) seven of us—two professors and five undergraduate teacher candidates—presented a session on "Making Diversity Awareness Part of Your Teaching." In the sessions, participants were presented a rationale for the experiences to be modeled, time to debrief the experiences and the opportunity to explore how each participant could use the activities in his/her teaching.

The session consisted of a series of interactive activities explained below. These activities are: (1) Best Friends: to recognize the place race plays in our perceptions of people and in our values; (2) Conclusion Jumping: to identify common stereotypes and to raise awareness of common attitudes and feelings toward sexual orientation and gender; (3) Banana Exercise: to introduce the concept of stereotypes, and (4) Cultural Differences in Communication: to point out the impact culture has on communication style and comfort.

Best Friends: Again, the purpose of this activity is to recognize the place race plays in our perceptions of people and in our values. A white board and markers, or chart paper and markers are the supplies needed for this activity. Participants form dyads. Each describes to his/her partner his/her best friend. When done, some share aloud. Characteristics named are listed on the board or chart paper. The absence of any mention of race should be the result. With people close to us, superficial characteristics lose their potency. When describing strangers or acquaintances, we use race.

Conclusion Jumping: This activity has three purposes: (1) to identify common stereotypes and raise awareness of common attitudes and feelings toward sexual orientation and gender; (2) to point out that almost all of us have commonly-held stereotypes that are triggered by these words; and (3) to build awareness of our own unconscious biases. Chart paper and markers as well as pieces of paper described below are needed for this activity.

Each participant is handed a piece of paper with a word written on it from the following list which is provided on a chart:

Female
Feminine
Woman
Girl
Male
Masculine
Man
Boy
Lesbian
Gay Man
Homosexual
Heterosexual.

Participants then walk around the room and ask at least ten other participants to say the first thing that comes to mind when they hear that word/phrase. Participants write down responses, keeping track of responses given more than once.

On chart paper, which is posted around the room, participants list the responses they received. Group discussion is next and the following facilitating questions are asked. How difficult was it to think of a response? What were the common responses in each category? What were the similarities and differences for each specific category (e.g., woman/girl/female/feminine)? What patterns are noted?

This activity can also be done using different ethnic groups, different religions, or different disabilities.

Banana Exercise: This activity is used to explain the concept of stereotyping and to illustrate how generalizations influence our thinking. The materials needed are one banana for each group of four to five people and chart paper and markers. This activity also works with lemons, limes or tangerines rather than bananas.

The audience is divided into small groups of four to five people. All the bananas are put out on a table where everyone can see them. The facilitator asks the audience to shout out all the characteristics of bananas they know (e.g., yellow, you peel them, eat them). These characteristics are listed on the chart paper.

One person from each group comes up to the table and selects one banana for his/her group. Each group then studies its particular banana and makes note of all special markings on it. After three to five minutes, one person from each group returns the banana to the table in front of everyone.

The facilitator then mixes up the order of the bananas and asks one person from each group to come up to the front and pick out that group's banana. This presents no problem as the bananas have become distinct and individual.

The facilitator then encourages comments from the group about the process. The conclusion should be that we group things and people into categories without paying attention to individual characteristics. There is little danger in doing this with objects, but when we do this with people, it is called stereotyping and it can prevent us from seeing people as people, from seeing the individual.

Cultural Differences in Communication: This exercise points out our low comfort level with a non-mainstream communication style. It also demonstrates how culture influences communication. No materials are needed.

The audience is divided into dyads. Each dyad is to stand up, face each other, and be close enough that their toes are touching the other person's toes. Then each person talks for one minute about her/his favorite movie (or vacation, or any other topic of the facilitator's choice). After both partners have had a chance to talk, after two minutes, the audience may sit down. They discuss how it felt. Was eye contact easy or difficult? How was body language? The facilitator explains that in our mainstream culture, we talk about one arm's length apart, but in other cultures, e.g., cultures in the Middle East, standing much closer is the norm.

Other areas of cultural communication style may also be discussed if time allows. Eye contact is considered proper in our culture but not in all cultures. In some cultures, it is common for people of the same sex to hold hands while walking. We shake hands when we meet someone but in other cultures this familial touching is considered rude and

disrespectful. We introduce ourselves with first names whereas other cultures use a much more formal system, often with the person with more status being the one to start the introduction.

The audience then discusses how this knowledge of diversity awareness, brought to the forefront through the above exercises, might influence their teaching. They state what they can do differently as a result of these activities. Each participant should be able to leave with at least two very specific, very practical strategies to use in his/her classroom.

Through these activities and the debriefing which accompanies them, teachers and teacher educators can create human relation experiences to eradicate biases based on race, gender, ethnicity, class, disability, and sexual orientation. By so doing, we create classrooms that are fair and meet the needs of all our students.

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